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INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE
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STATE FOR EAP/CM, EEB/CIP, OES/STC AND OES/PCI

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: ECON ETRD HK TINT SOCI CH
SUBJECT: HONG KONG YAHOO AND MICROSOFT BLOCK ADULT CONTENT

¶1. (U) Hong Kong's major English daily, the South China Morning Post (SCMP), reported January 17 that both Yahoo.com.hk and Microsoft's Bing search engine in Hong Kong were now blocking adult content through the use of strict "SafeSearch" filters. Users of the Yahoo-owned Flickr photo sharing website in Hong Kong were also reportedly prohibited from posting or sharing adult content. Although users in most jurisdictions are able to customize search parameters to include or exclude adult content, Hong Kong users do not have that option. The SCMP reported both Yahoo and Microsoft attributed their strict filtering to their desire to respect "local customs, norms and laws," and noted that both companies enforced similar restrictions in South Korea, India and Singapore.

¶2. (SBU) Yahoo! Asia Director for Public Policy Patrick Chu confirmed to EconOff that Yahoo! did use SafeSearch to filter pornographic images from its Hong Kong searches. He denied the SCMP implication that this was a new policy, however. Yahoo! had been filtering adult content since 2007, said Chu. Hong Kong law makes it an offense to publish obscene articles or pictures. In the wake of legal cases in 2007 and 2008 that resulted in fines for individuals convicted of linking to or posting lewd material, Yahoo! decided to filter searches to protect its local staff and directors, said Chu. Yahoo!'s decision to filter this material was purely its own, he said, and denied that the Hong Kong government had ever contacted Yahoo! Asia regarding its treatment of adult content. Chu insisted that Yahoo! Asia was committed to internet freedom and did not filter searches for other content. The SCMP article was the first time anyone had raised the issue since Yahoo! Asia began using SafeSearch, said Chu.

¶3. (SBU) Microsoft's Director of Legal and Corporate Affairs Winnie Yeung similarly told EconOff that Microsoft used SafeSearch to filter adult content from its Hong Kong searches. Yeung felt the SCMP article was misleading since the strict SafeSearch setting was used in several Asian countries, not just Hong Kong. The reason was that these countries were considered "more conservative." She insisted Microsoft was not asked by the Hong Kong government or any other government to implement filtering but then said she would have to confirm this. She added that Microsoft had used this filtering functionality since Bing's launch but that the strict setting in some Asia countries was implemented only in September 2009. Yeung stated that Microsoft had not received any customer complaints or inquiries about the strict SafeSearch setting used in Hong Kong until the SCMP article appeared. She also noted that her office had received inquiries from the Hong Kong government.

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